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AUTHOR Jolliffe, Lee
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ABSTRACT

About 350,000 freelance magazine articles were purchased by magazine editors last year from the 22,000 freelancers and 225,000 would-be freelancers in the United States. A study examined the factors editors judge most important in selecting freelance magazine article proposals, using factor analysis and qualitative examination of persuasive elements. Ten sample query letters, written by several professional writers with freelancing experience, were provided to 5 editors, 25 regular contributors, and 100 novice writers (5 editors, 18 regular contributors, and 21 novice writers responded). Letters were rated on writer experience, skill displayed, research, article idea, appropriateness to the market, and overall quality. Results showed that (1) editors' judgments of article proposal quality were chiefly influenced by the article idea being offered (47.4%) and writer's skill (31%); (2) both regular contributors and rejected query writers place article attributes first, market appropriateness second, and skill displayed third; and (3) persuasion factors considered most important by editors were cognitive complexity similar to the editor's publication; concrete, vivid, readable, varied, and logical language use; and human interest. Findings suggest that novices who offer a well-written, human-focused article are as likely to achieve acceptance as long-time professional writers. (An appendix of analysis of the 10 query letters and the letters and 31 references are attached.) (MS)

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Magazine Article Placement: How Editors, Regular Contributors, and Novice Writers Rate Query Letters

Lee Jolliffe
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism
University of Missouri at Columbia

P.O. Box 838
Columbia, MO 65205

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Magazine Article Placement:
How Editors, Regular Contributors, and
Novice Writers Rate Query Letters

by Lee Jolliffe
Assistant Professor
University of Missouri at Columbia

About 350,000 freelance magazine articles were purchased by magazine editors last year from the 22,000 freelancers and 225,000 would-be freelancers in the U.S. This article examines the factors editors judge most important in selecting freelance magazine article proposals using factor analysis and qualitative examination of persuasive elements. Five elements editors have said they use in judging queries (Jolliffe 1988) are experience, skill displayed, evidence of research, attributes of the article offered, and appropriateness to the market. Ratings of these factors were compared with overall quality ratings to learn the most important factors in editorial judgment. Responses of five editors are also compared with those of ten each of their regular contributors and recently rejected query-writers.

Editors' judgments of article proposal quality were chiefly influenced by the article idea being offered (47.4%) and writer's skill (31%). Both regular contributors and rejected query writers place article attributes first, market appropriateness second, and skill displayed third. Persuasion factors most important were similar cognitive complexity; concrete, vivid, readable, varied, and logical language use; and human interest. Persuasion factors that were neutral or unimportant included source credibility (experience and expertness), making a smaller request to achieve acceptance, triggering negative inferences by using phrases that suggest inexperience, presence of subtle bias, and minor grammatical errors made in haste or anxiety.

Overall rankings of the letters suggested strongly that novices who offer a well-written, human-focused article are as likely to achieve acceptance as long-time professional writers.

Magazine Article Placement:
How Editors, Regular Contributors, and
Novice Writers Rate Query Letters

About 348,000 freelance magazine articles were purchased by U.S. consumer and farm magazines in 1988 (calculated from Neff 1988, Fry 1988). Some of these articles were written by the 21,800 magazine writers and editors in the U.S. (Polking, Bloss, and Cannon 1983; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1988), and some were written by the more than 225,000 hopefuls who subscribe such magazines as Writer's Digest (ADI 1986).

Given the level of effort being expended to market freelance magazine articles, very little research effort has been devoted to freelancing and freelance marketing. Terrell (1986) began work to establish the size of the market for freelanced articles and Fry (1988) determined the typical numbers of manuscripts purchased and prices paid for freelanced material by magazines. Jolliffe (1988) learned the primary criteria magazine editors said they used to judge article proposals. However, more research is certainly needed in this area.

In the present study, magazine editors' judgments of article proposals are examined to learn which factors are most strongly related to their overall judgments of article proposals, or "query" letters. A comparison is made between the magazine editors' judgments of query letters and judgments by novice freelancers and regular contributors, of the same letters. This

comparison may help explain why some writers are more successful in placing articles than others.

Literature Review

Researchers have examined the relationships between newspaper editors and sources using coorientation and gatekeeping perspectives. Similar examination of the magazine editor/-freelancer source relationship may be appropriate. Persuasion research also suggests directions for research into magazine query acceptance.

Tichenor and his colleagues (1967) examined relationships between editors and sources and the resultant placement of articles in newspapers. They studied the success of agricultural extension agents in placing stories in local newspapers, addressing the research question: "When a purposive communicator attempts to place messages in a mass media channel, what determines whether he will succeed?" (p. 32). Placement success was associated with similarity of news judgment between editor and agent, and editor evaluation of audience appeal. It was not associated with face-to-face contact or circulation size.

Tichenor and colleagues (1967) found that editors and agents were more in agreement on news judgments (61 percent) than either group predicted (45 percent). (R.E. Carter [1958] had had similar results with editors and physicians.) Tichenor, Olien, Harrison, and Donohue (1980) later studied coorientation among newspaper editors, reporters, and scientists as sources. Again the agreement among these groups on news values was greater than the subjects predicted.

Several researchers have examined editorial judgment using gatekeeping as a framework. Fowler and Smith (1981) learned that newspaper stories are more likely to meet an editor's standards if they seem likely to interest the audience and if they fall into the same broad general categories that the publication already uses. Whitney and Becker's (1982) gate-keeping study showed that editors are more influenced by other competing media than by their own personal news values.

These studies suggest that magazine editors, too, may select article proposals based on audience appeal and content of competing publications. However, persuasion research warns against too readily predicting reasons for the actions of a persuasive message recipient, here the magazine editor. Miller, Mayerson, Pogue, and Whitehouse (1977) studied the motivations that observers are likely to ascribe to the actions of others. They learned that observers are prone to make inferences about others' motivations without recognizing the situational forces operating on the actor. Persuasion theorist M.J. Smith (1982) notes that "people typically act for goal-oriented reasons, rather than passively react to the vagaries of external message strategies" and also that "people choose to enact behaviors for the purpose of achieving personal goals."

Factors persuasion researchers have suggested that may be relevant to magazine query selection include

- rejection of a persuasive message if it comes from a low credibility source (Hass 1981)
- greater likelihood of acceptance if a request is smaller (Tracy, Craig, Smith, and Spisak 1984)

- negative inferences triggered by cues (such as "I've always wanted to write") (Cronkhite and Liska 1976)

- rejection of a persuasive message that is biased (Faison 1961, Dycus 1976)

- acceptance of a persuasive message in spite of nonfluencies resulting from anxiety (Bradac, Bowers, and Courtwright 1979, Ochs 1979, Tannen 1985)

- acceptance of a message whose cognitive complexity matches one's own communication pattern (Applegate 1982)

- acceptance of messages whose language is more concrete (Borgida and Nisbett 1977, Petty and Cacioppo 1983), more vivid (Schiefer 1986, Collins and Taylor 1988, Wharton 1988), more readable (Carbone 1975), more varied (Carbone 1975; Bradac, Bowers, and Courtwright 1979), and more logical (Hazelton, Cupach, and Liska 1986), and

- acceptance of messages that create human interest by means of direct references to people (rather than an alleged generalized relationship between the audience and the issue) (Carbone 1975).

Tourangeau and Rasinski (1988) have described the cognitive processes of a recipient responding to a persuasive message and, if the message engages the recipient's attention, the rendering of an integrated judgment (Anderson 1974, 1981). According to these researchers, judgment of a persuasive message includes scoring on the factors the message recipient chooses to judge; mental weighting of each factor; integration of the weighted scores into an overall judgment; and delivery of the judgment. A similar means of soliciting judgments of query letters was used in this study. In this study, this process of making an integrated judgment of a persuasive message is built into the research method, using factors Jolliffe (1988) identified as those editors said they relied upon: writer experience, writing skill displayed, evidence of research, and a clearly delineated

article idea, appropriate to the market.

Research Method

The procedures used in this study were as follows:

Ten sample query letters were provided to editors, regular contributors, and novice writers. These letters included varying levels of persuasive (or nonpersuasive) information, as well as varying levels of the critical attributes Jolliffe (1988) identified. Each letter included a box with Likert-type scales of writer experience, skill displayed, research, article idea, appropriateness to the market, and overall quality. Respondents were asked to rate each letter on these attributes. Regression analysis was then used to determine which factors each respondent group relied upon most in making their judgments of overall query letter quality. Respondents were also asked to rate each letter as "accepted," "rejected," or "accepted on speculation," and to make any comments they cared to by marking on the letters. These results were used to explore the persuasion issues raised earlier.

Test Letters. The ten sample query letters used in the study were written to demonstrate varying levels of writer experience, skill, background research, article plan, and market appropriateness. The letters also included details that might influence their persuasiveness, such as poor language use, cue phrases, displays of expertise in the subject area(s) of the query, variance of concreteness and complexity, and variance of readability.

These queries were written by several professional writers with freelancing experience, but deliberately made weaker or

stronger in the various attributes being tested. (See Appendix for copies of the letters and notes on the intended qualities of each.)

Panel of Experts. The completed letters were pretested by a "panel of experts," five editors of nearby regional magazines, to assure that none of the letters created wide disagreement among the editors as to the presence, absence, or neutrality of each rating factor. With two minor adjustments in content, the letters were then used in the study.

Respondents. Five editors from Whittle Communications in Knoxville, Tennessee, participated in the study and provided access to the names and addresses of 25 of their regular contributors and copies of more than 100 recent query letters. The recent query writers were treated as the novice group because their letters had been rejected. These respondents were sent the test package in August 1988. The package included instructions, a description of a hypothetical magazine to which the queries were addressed, and the ten query letters.

Analysis. Lotus 1-2-3 software was used to perform regression analyses of factors marked on the returned questionnaires, and the resulting correlation coefficients were converted first to absolutes (i.e., positive numbers) and then to percentages showing the weight of influence of each factor on the letters' overall quality ratings.

Results

Five editors, 18 regular contributors, and 21 novice writers responded. All responses were factor analysed and examined in

terms of the persuasion issues discussed earlier.

Factor Analysis. Editors' responses were factor analysed with the following results:

Editors: All Variables
Regression Output

Constant	-0.13969
Std Err of Y Est	0.986627
R Squared	0.753844
No. of Observations	50
Degrees of Freedom	44

	Exp.	Skill	Research	Market	Attributes
X Coefficient(s)	0.033384	0.399118	-0.12484	0.117526	0.608501
Std Err of Coef.	0.084562	0.106451	0.122471	0.092027	0.113354
COEF./STD ERR.	39.5	374.9	-101.9	127.7	536.8
RELATIVE WEIGHT	2.6%	31.1%	9.7%	9.2%	47.4%

The most influential factors on overall quality ratings were writing skill and presentation of the article idea. Surprisingly, the writer's previous experience was the least related to overall quality ratings, and higher ratings on research were a negative influence on the overall quality of the letters, as editors perceived them.

The two most influential factors (writing skill and article attributes), when separated from the rest, resulted in the following correlation coefficients and relative weights in relation to overall quality:

Editors: Main Factors
Regression Output

Constant	0.22034
Std Err of Y Est	0.976702
R Squared	0.742324
No. of Observations	50
Degrees of Freedom	47

(Editors: Main Factors [cont])

	Attributes	Skills
X Coefficient(s)	0.631823	0.370979
Std Err of Coef.	0.074206	0.089779
COEF./STD ERR.	851	413
RELATIVE WEIGHT	63.0%	37.0%

Overall quality ratings by regular contributors, like those of editors, were most heavily influenced by article idea. However, regular contributors placed a much higher emphasis on an article's appropriateness to the market. Again, the best-researched article proposals received lower overall quality scores. Writing skill displayed was important to regular contributors, but they placed less value on skill than the editors did:

Regular Contributors: All Factors
Regression Output

Constant	-0.14521
Std Err of Y Est	0.742364
R Squared	0.844132
No. of Observations	190
Degrees of Freedom	184

	Exp.	Skill	Research	Market	Attributes
X Coefficient(s)	0.089649	0.236271	-0.03425	0.227558	0.497371
Std Err of Coef.	0.037550	0.049391	0.050860	0.033879	0.059300
COEFF/STD ERR	239	479	-67	672	839
RELATIVE WEIGHT	8.3%	21.8%	6.2%	21.0%	45.8%

Novice writers' responses were very similar to those of regular contributors, in that they emphasized market appropriateness considerably more than editors did. Like editors and regular contributors, novices rated queries primarily on the

attributes of the article being offered:

Novice Writers: All Factors
Regression Output

Constant	-0.08603
Std Err of Y Est	0.779002
R Squared	0.795911
No. of Observations	195
Degrees of Freedom	189

	Exp.	Skill	Research	Market	Attributes
X Coefficient(s)	0.046887	0.154937	-0.01043	0.250683	0.539639
Std Err of Coef.	0.036829	0.048122	0.052830	0.037310	0.055433
COEFF/STD ERR	127.3	322.0	-19.7	671.9	973.5
RELATIVE WEIGHT	4.9%	15.5%	1.0%	25.0%	53.8%

Novice writers placed more weight on the experience of the writer than did editors or regular contributors. Again, demonstrating research on the topic had a negative influence on the overall quality rating.

Persuasion. The issues raised by persuasion research were explored here only qualitatively. While further analysis at a later date may yield more concrete results, respondent ratings and comments provide indications as to the persuasiveness of certain tactics in query writing. Each persuasion issue explored is listed below, along with comments on the rankings editors assigned to letters bearing these traits:

1) Rejection of a persuasive message if it comes from a low credibility source (Hass 1981): Both experience and expertness have a bearing on credibility (Cronkhite and Liska 1976, Chebat and Filiatrault 1987). In the results of this study, experience counted for little in persuading editors, writing expertise for much, and subject area expertise for little. The two top-ranking

letters, one on undiscovered sports and another on city wildlife, were submitted by writers who gave no indications of having experience, but did display some writing skills. Several of the lowest ranked letters (including B.J. on the Cayman Islands, the Sixties, and the creationist) displayed poor writing expertise, while experience and subject expertise were widely different in these letters. One letter (on the Amish photography story) ranked fourth in spite of having neither experience nor expertness to recommend it.

Neither university teaching nor newspaper experience are helpful in increasing credibility or persuasiveness. The creationist letter, from a university teacher, ranked seventh, while the newspaper experience in the employee-owned companies letter was neutral (ranking fifth).

Student status damaged credibility and persuasiveness when not coupled with competent writing (the Sixties letter, ranked eighth). A display of confidence not accompanied by competent writing did not assist in establishing credibility, either (B.J. on the Cayman Islands, ranked ninth). However, competent writing and mention of past success at the same publication resulted in a high score for an article even though it proposed material already used by a competing medium (Yuppie boutiques, ranked third).

2) Greater likelihood of acceptance if a request is smaller (Tracy, Craig, Smith, and Spisak 1984): In one letter (employee-owned companies), the writer offered to produce a shorter piece, rather than a full-length feature. Editors'

responses to this were neutral; the letter ranked fifth.

3) Negative inferences triggered by cues (such as "I've always wanted to write," "now that I'm retired," and "I'm a journalism student") (Cronkhite and Liska 1976): While editors marked these phrases in the letters and wrote comments like "uh-oh" and "never never say this" in the margins, letters with cues that the writers were inexperienced outsiders were not uniformly rejected.

The city wildlife letter, containing the phrase "always wanted to write," ranked second, while the multiple cues in the Amish photography letter ("my teachers said," "always wanted to be a writer," "your readers would enjoy") resulted in a rank of fourth. Note, however, that editors commented they'd want to see the photographs being offered and if these were good, one suggested paying a finder's fee to the incompetent writer, one suggested planning on a heavy rewrite, and one said outright that it would be best to assign the story to a more experienced writer. Finally, the retiree (employee-owned businesses letter) ranked fifth, potentially making retired status neutral as well.

Overall, it appears that cues triggering negative inferences can be outweighed by writing skill displayed or a good article idea.

4) Rejection of a persuasive message that is biased (Faison 1961, Dycus 1976): Blatant bias has been well-established as a negative selection factor in persuasive messages, but subtle bias was tested with one letter here. From a creation scientist who styles himself as a "Christian geophysicist," one letter offers a

"balanced" view of the creationist-evolutionist controversy. In spite of numerous hints of the writer's bias, editors were surprisingly willing to consider running the story: two ranked it fourth and two others ranked it sixth. Its average rank was seventh. Only one marked with margin with a comment on the bias. Another wrote that she would assign the story "on speculation" ..."to see what he'd do with it."

5) Acceptance of a persuasive message in spite of nonfluencies resulting from anxiety (Bradac, Bowers, and Courtwright 1979; Ochs 1979; Tannen 1985): Three of these letters contained minor grammatical errors; a fourth was more excruciatingly error-ridden. The Ohio sports letter contained minor punctuation errors; editors ranked it first. Apparently minor errors don't have a significant negative effect when combined with high scores for article idea. The employee-owned businesses letter contained a few misspellings; that letter was ranked fifth. The misspellings were apparently part of an overall picture of mediocrity. B.J. on the Cayman Islands used fragments and repetitions; her letter was ranked ninth. Finally, the worst offender was the writer offering the "theory of relatively" story; her poor usage and nonfluencies were again part of an overall picture, this one of complete incompetence. Thus, it appears that nonfluencies alone do not affect persuasive message acceptance or rejection.

6) Acceptance of a message whose cognitive complexity matches one's own communication pattern (Applegate 1982): This

factor appears to be very influential in query letter acceptance or rejection. The letter with the greatest cognitive complexity (the creationist) scored poorly, ranking seventh. Several editors commented on the writer's probable inability to transfer good academic writing into good magazine writing. The letters with the lowest cognitive complexity ranked last, including the Sixties at eighth place, B.J. on the Cayman Islands at ninth place, and the theory of 'relatively' at tenth place. The only high-ranking letter with low cognitive complexity (the Amish photographer) ranked fourth, but editors planned to use the idea without actually using the writer's work.

7) Acceptance of messages whose language is more concrete (Borgida and Nisbett 1977, Petty and Cacioppo 1983), more vivid (Schiefer 1986, Collins and Taylor 1988, Wharton 1988), more readable (Carbone 1975), more varied (Carbone 1975; Bradac, Bowers, and Courtwright 1979), and more logical (Hazelton, Cupach, and Liska 1986): All these persuasion factors appeared influential in the rankings of the query letters. The highest ranking letters, Ohio sports and city wildlife, demonstrated all these traits to some degree. The third-ranking letter, yuppie boutiques, was slightly less readable, but was strong in all the other traits. The fourth-ranking letter, the Amish photographer, has none of these traits, which may explain why editors sought ways to use the story without the writer. The fifth-ranking letter is readable and logical, but not concrete, vivid, or varied in language use.

The sixth letter, the king of Tunisia, created the greatest

disagreement among the editors, with several ranking it first and several ranking it nearly last; it does display all these persuasive language traits, but apparently the risk represented by a first-person story with little connection to the audience outweighed the quality of the language used as an element of judgment.

The remaining letters display fewer and fewer persuasive language traits: The creationist, ranked seventh, is abstract, not vivid, not readable, somewhat varied in language choices, and only somewhat logical. The eighth-ranking Sixties letter has none of these traits, the ninth-ranking Cayman Islands letter has only vividness (and not much of that), and the tenth-ranking theory of relatively letter again has none.

Thus, it would seem that these qualities of the language used in queries is very influential on query acceptance.

8) Acceptance of messages that create human interest by means of direct references to people (rather than an alleged generalized relationship between the audience and the issue) (Carbone 1975): Results here were somewhat mixed. Direct references to people did not uniformly result in a higher rank, but direct references to people were missing from all the lower ranked letters. The first (Ohio sports), second (city wildlife), fourth (Amish photographer), and sixth (king of Tunisia) letters contained direct references to people around whom the stories would revolve. The third (yuppie boutiques), fifth (employee-owned companies), and seventh through tenth (creationist, Sixties, B.J., and theory of relatively) letters contained no

direct references to people around whom the stories would revolve. (The Sixties letter might be seen as including a person-centered story. A father, "an aging hippie," is mentioned, but since most adults might fit that description, the reference does not seem direct--not enough information is offered.)

Discussion

Although editors believe they use five factors when judging query letters (Jolliffe 1988), their ratings of query letters show that the article idea is paramount, followed by the writer's display of skill. The other factors editors thought were relevant, including appropriateness to market, research, and writer experience, are far less influential than editors believe. Research, in fact, was negatively related to editors' quality ratings of queries. Thus, it seems that the most important aspect of querying is having something of interest to sell.

Writers, both regular contributors and novices, also rated queries first for article idea. However, the two groups of writers were more in agreement than expected, both making greater use of appropriateness to the market than editors did. Regular contributors placed slightly more emphasis on skill than did novices, while novices placed more emphasis on the writers' experience than editors or regular contributors.

Of the factors earlier researchers had found important to persuasion, some were supported here and others were not. Of greatest importance was a cognitive complexity matching that of the target publication. Very complex and very simple language

structures were associated with lower rankings. Language use that was concrete, vivid, readable, varied, and logical was strongly associated with higher rankings.

Lack of human interest was strongly associated with failure to persuade editors to use a story, although a few stories with no tie to a central character did achieve higher rankings.

Minor grammatical flaws were not a negative factor in persuasion, as previous researchers had also learned. Negative inferences about the persuader drawn from message content were not the negative influence on persuasion that previous researchers had found. Instead, negative inferences could be countered by offering a good article idea and a display of writing skills. Poor source credibility could also be countered with a good idea and good skills.

Further research is certainly needed. At present, all indications are that magazine editors read queries primarily in search of a product: a magazine article, one whose complexity matches their publication, whose language is vivid and readable, whose focus is a human character. Novices who can offer this product are as likely to succeed as long-time professional writers.

APPENDIX

Letter A: The "king" of Tunisia speaks in Ohio

Factor Analysis. An experienced writer demonstrating good skills and a strong background in the subject matter as well offers an article that is somewhat chancy: first person, quirky topic, tenuous connection to the audience.

Persuasion. The writer uses concrete language, shows independence of point of view, offers diversity, is an expert in the field, adds geographic range, and shows past success as a writer. The query is two pages long, rather than the popular press recommendation of one page.

July 9, 1988

Ms. Barbara Goodey
OHIO'S FINEST
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Barbara,

Cognitive complexity is high.

On April 10th, His Majesty Rechad al-Mahdi bin Hussein bin Nasr, King of Tunisia, came to Ohio, gave a well-received speech as part of the Celebrities of Note Series at the Ohio Theater, got himself written up and photographed for the Columbus Dispatch, lunched elegantly with his sponsors, the Women's Association of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and left by commercial air (not private plane) for London, one of many cities the king likes to call home. Home in exile, that is.

Concrete language.

Real people.

In his speech, Rechad said he and members of his family fled the two-month-old Republic of Tunisia in mid-October 1957 in fear for their lives. Without naming the perpetrators, he graphically described three attempts on his own person....

In fact, no King of Tunisia named Rechad al-Mahdi was ever crowned and these stories, although colorful, are sheer Arabian Nights. As a scholar of Middle Eastern history fluent in Arabic, I found even al-Mahdi's accent dubious.

Expert in subject.

Independence of point of view.

...In his royal wake, the king left a lot of unanswered questions, and a commensurate number of doubts, about just who Rechad al-Mahdi is.

I tried to find out....

Good skills.

Language variety.

These are excepts from a piece which, I hope, felicitously combines humor, mystery, Middle Eastern history, and an odd, aleatory link Ohio has with each of these. I've written it in the first person as something of a detective story; I ask questions the reader would want to ask. I have been careful to avoid the cuteness that often mars first-person stories. I focus on al-Mahdi and the search for his identity.

Adds geographic range.

First person difficult.

I'd like to sell first North American serial rights for this to OHIO'S FINEST. I've got notes, numbers, tapes and a bibliography for fact-checking the story. I don't have pix, but the Dispatch has at least one from April 10th. And there are three people in Columbus and one in Marietta who could be photographed. Photos of another relevant character (Habib Bourguiba) are obtainable from the embassy or from wire files. Thanks.

Sincerely and, you might say, authentically,

John M. McDougal

John M. McDougal
480 W. Tenth Avenue
Columbus, OH 43278

PS: I've published in **Columbus Monthly, The Christian Science Monitor,** The Dallas Times-Herald's **Westward, Aramco World Magazine, Fodor's Modern Guides,** The New York **Times, The Daily Texan,** and I've worked for Texas Monthly Press as a research editor.

Experienced writer– Past successes.

Longer than recommended.

Letter B: The Amish photographer

Factor Analysis. This letter comes from a completely inexperienced and very unskilled writer. Her research has been minimal and it is difficult to tell what kind of text she has in mind for the article she proposes. However, she offers a very good article idea that is not dependent upon writing quality. She offers photographs that an outside source likened to those of Ansel Adams and Margaret Bourke-White.

Persuasion. The letter is poorly presented, with an odd layout and script typeface. Though brief (which should be a positive), the letter is in a nonstandard format for queries. The cue phrases "I have always wanted to write" and "my teachers said" were used in the query. The writing is not fluent, nor is it conceptually complex. In fact, the author writes in simple sentences that are not unified by thesis sentences or any clear progression of concepts. The letter does offer an article idea that can be easily used without the writer, since it hinges on photographs. A key question here is whether editors will "steal" an article idea from someone they feel is unqualified.

Suggests does not live/act in business world; may be in her 50s or 60s – behind the times.

Rt. 1 Box 89
Plain City, Oh 43555

Poor skills - spelling.

Country locale.

Dear Mrs. Goddey,

Poor skills. Awkward – lack of flow to prose; not fluent.

Low cognitive complexity.

Some people think the Amish don't like to be photographed. This is not true. Amy Smucker of Plain City is 88 years old now and she is a good photographer and Amish. Once a man from New York with an art gallery tried to get her to let him hold an exhibit. She is very good. She has taken many photographs over the years that show Amish life, including barn-building, buggies, cooking, farming and going to church. These are beautiful photographs and are as good as pictures by Ansel Adams or Margaret Burke-White.

Sp.

Mrs. Smucker has agreed to let me write an article about her and her photographs and she will let you choose pictures to use in your magazine. I think this would make a wonderful article for your magazine, something your readers would enjoy and remember.

Cue phrase: hasn't worked with editors before.

I have always wanted to be a writer and my teachers have always said that I was talented in this area.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Cue phrases: inexperience, naive.

Sincerely,

Tendra Collins

Tendra Collins

Negative inferences from script type: Unbusinesslike, probably a "housewife."

Will editors use photos without the writer? Story idea is very good.

Poor page layout; inference may be doesn't care enough to retype or is too unprofessional to notice problem with layout.

Letter C: Undiscovered Ohio sports

Factor Analysis. In this letter, the writer remains a neutral element; the writer makes no mention of writing background, but gives an adequate display of skills. Both usage and concrete detail in the content speak for the "editability" of this writer's submission. The research is that of an aficionado and thus is likely to result in thorough and knowledgeable coverage of the subject. The article(s) proposed are relevant to the market, although the exact scope of the article(s) is left in question.

Persuasion. The writer offers no writing credentials, but does not make any overt grammar errors. The writing is "people-centered," which is appropriate to the magazine. Also, the writer does have expertise in the subject matter. Thus, his/her persuasive credibility is likely to be good. Common cues that lead to inferences about writers are missing; i.e., the writer makes no statements about student, homemaker, retiree, or novice status. In addition, the writer's gender is left in question. The writer brings diversity of point of view, in that he/she offers to cover unusual topics.

The query is posed in nonstandard format and the opening is very weakly written. On the other hand, the query writer offers concrete details and "editable" text, which an editor may feel can be easily reworked to increase its flair. In addition, the writer offers a choice of several topics, which may increase the chances of a positive reaction to the query.

Ms. Barbara Goodey
Ohio's Finest
1465 N. High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43201

Non-standard query format.

Dear Ms. Goodey:

Only weak writing in query.

Central Ohio is a great place for sports, even aside from Ohio State football. As a 25-year resident of Columbus and an avid devotee of--well, let's call them "undiscovered" sports, I'd like to write a couple of articles for you on Central Ohio athletes who will probably never become household names nationally but whose skills and accomplishments merit recognition closer to home. Some examples:

Seeks compliance to smaller request.

- Marlene Swigert, a ten-year-old Lancaster girl who holds a regional record in barrel racing. In four years of competition, she and her pinto pony, Blitz, have won seven championship trophies.

Good concrete details.

People focus.

- Tiffy Borchers, a Dublin high school senior, who surprisingly won a scholarship to Miami University in ice hockey. Tiffy is likely to be the only woman on the team and has a good chance of being its captain.

- Barney Warren, a computer programmer from Chilicothe, who has been driving his Saab-powered Elva Class D sports racer in regional auto races for nearly 30 years. He's not Bobby Rahal, but his devotion to the sport is incredible--especially since in all this time he has had just one crew member: his mother.

Offers choices of ideas.

Diversity of point of view; unusual topics.

I have photos to accompany these articles, though some are several years old. As I said, I've been following these sports for a while.

Neutral on writing experience

I hope these ideas meet your needs. Thank you for your attention.

Strong on expertise in subject.

Sincerely,

Micki Wright

Micki Wright

No cues to negative statuses.

No cues to writer gender.

Letter D: Wildlife in Ohio cities

Factor Analysis. The writer is admittedly inexperienced here. The writing skill is adequate and some evidence of research is presented. The article is appropriate to the market, although skilled handling would be important to its final quality. In particular, the article needs a personality around which it can be centered. The writer is good but her prose style is not that of a polished professional.

Persuasion. The writer uses cues that suggest inexperience, particularly "have always enjoyed writing." The issue of article timing is mentioned, which trade press writers suggest is important. Relevance to the audience is made clear through references to wildlife encounters by other Ohio city dwellers. This writer uses a standard query format, concrete detail, mention of the experts she will interview, and excellent copyediting skills.

July 10, 1988
1365 E. King Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 43266

Standard query format.

Ms. Janet Bond
Managing Editor
Ohio's Finest Magazine
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Wrong addressee; cue to inexperience with magazines.

Good skills.
No nonfluencies.
No copyediting errors.

Dear Ms. Bond:

Somewhat weak as an imitation of professional magazine writing.

Three baby opossums made their home in my vegetable garden this summer. This wouldn't be unusual if I lived in Circleville or Athens, but I live in downtown Cincinnati. Other people tell me they've also had encounters with wildlife in the city. My neighbors describe fighting off hungry raccoons and a jogger friend of mine says he frequently sees muskrats, wood ducks, Canada geese and other non-city fauna on his early morning treks through the river park.

— Concrete detail.

I want to write an article about wild animals living in Ohio's cities. What kinds are there? How many? What harm might they cause? Why are they in the city, instead of out in the fields and forests?

Names expert sources.

I will interview Dr. Jack Lang of Ohio State University's wildlife clinic; Dr. Lang's patients include hawks, owls, deer, and many small mammals, all brought to him by city dwellers who've rescued these wild animals from harm. I will also talk with specialists at the Ohio Department of Wildlife, our city health department, and the university's zoologists. I propose finishing this article by early September for your November issue. (November is a peak season for wildlife encounters, according to Dr. Lang.)

Evidence of research.

— Concrete detail.

I have a Bachelor's degree in English from Miami University and have always enjoyed writing.

Negative cue phrase: inexperienced.

Sincerely,

Maureen Tompson

Maureen Tompson

Letter E: Employee-owned Ohio companies

Factor Analysis. This writer's experience is limited and includes only a few newspaper articles. His usage is somewhat poor, with several misspellings and repetitions. He mentions having on hand some research, but does not use it to give color to his query. The subject could be appropriate to the market if the writer could focus on the right individuals, but he has not located any central characters yet.

Persuasion. This writer offers to produce a short article, which compliance-gaining researchers have found is more persuasive than making larger requests at first. The text is abstract and the opening is dull. The query is generally in standard format. The writer attempts to appear professional using printed stationary, but then mentions being retired, a cue to his lack of experience as a freelancer. He professes expertise in the subject matter.

SHELDON L. MACENROE
4615 Linden Heights Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 49821

Cue: intends to appear professional. Treats writing as a business.

July 10, 1988

121 Donnybrook
Marion, Ohio 45632

Barbara Goodey
Ohio's Finest
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43201

Minimal skills–spelling errors, dull writing, repetitious sentence structures (esp para. 2), "I," "I," "I."

Dear Ms. Goodey:

I'd like to write a piece on employee-owned companies in Ohio for Ohio's Finest -- either as a feature or for one of your shorter "departments."

Loses opportunity for anecdotes, ties to real people. Lack of professionalism.

I will be looking for exemplary people upon whom to focus the article. To find such people, I will interview employees of some of the 57 employee-owned Ohio companies. I am familiar with the terminology of business, but I believe I can write about the people, the companies and the challenges in language that's interesting to the lay person.

I've received information from the National Center for Employee Ownership on Ohio companies and I've got clips from the New York Times and other publications to give me background.

As a former mid-level manager of Felson Industries (an employee-owned company) in Marion, I can bring an understanding of the subject to my article. Since my retirement in 1986, I have written several articles for our local newspaper for the business section and would enjoy writing for Ohio's Finest.

Negative inference cue.

Dull sources. Cue to inexperience. Should have focused early on research on "selling" with anecdotes, color, real people.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Newspapers as an experience credential.

Sincerely,

Sheldon MacEnroe

Expertise in subject area. Offers diversity of point of view.

Letter F: Yuppie boutiques

Factor Analysis. This writer doesn't outline experience, but does mention a previous success writing an article for the target magazine and completing some newspaper feature work. The skill displayed is adequate but an understanding of the market is not; the writer offers work she has already sold to a competing medium. The article idea is clearly stated but the topic is a bit stale.

Persuasion. Presentation quality is poor; a dot matrix printer is used. The insider/outsider issue is tested, as the writer mentions past work for the magazine. Concrete, vivid lanuage is used, but there is no focus on a personality. The writer is not an expert in the subject being presented, merely an observer.

11680 Longwood, Apt. 3C
Cleveland Heights, OH 47242
(216) 887-9299

July 6, 1988

Ms. Barbara Goodey
Ohio's Finest
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Poor quality presentation--dot matrix.
Good skills, clean copyediting.

Dear Ms. Goodey: →

Doesn't use previous acceptance as excuse to be overfamiliar.
Businesslike.

Hope my manuscript on "adopting" zoo animals worked out for the August issue.

Insider.
Previous success with same magazine.
Shows experience.

I've been thinking about another topic your readers might find interesting: the proliferation of upscale boutiques catering to the "yuppie" lifestyle. I see this as a sort of "where to go and what you'll find there" article focusing on food (Harbinger's Deli, Bistro Chez Moi); clothing (The Point, Siggi's); cars (Columbus Motorwerk, Das BMW, and Deutsche Imports); and assorted paraphernalia (the entire Clevetown shopping scene). I covered these places in a series for the Plain Dealer's lifestyle section in May, but I think the topic would still be of interest to the statewide audience.

Dull material.

Rehashing from a competing market. Lack of professionalism.
Doesn't understand her audience's needs.

Please let me know if the "yuppie" thing would meet your needs, and thanks again for accepting the zoo piece. I'm looking forward to working with Ohio's Finest again.

Concrete language. Not focused on people.

Yours,

Katie Fisher

Katie Fisher

No experience in subject matter.

Letter G: Creation science vs. evolution

Factor Analysis. This writer presents experience in the subject matter and in academic writing, but not in magazine work. His skills are acceptable in that there are no overt errors; however, his sentence structures and choices of words are complex and abstract. It is not made clear just what he is proposing to write, but it appears that his submission will be a political essay. The article is not appropriate to the market, in that it does not focus on a personality nor does it lend itself to a narrative style. There is evidence that the writer has researched the topic.

Persuasion. This query tests the respondents' awareness of subtle bias. (Overt bias is so clearly a negative influence in persuasion research [Faison 1961, Dycus 1976] that it was thought not worth testing again.) This hypothetical writer is from the Institute of Creation Science in San Diego, but does not mention this association in the query. In other words, he attempting to hide his bias. He does provide cues in his text, however: "Christian geophysicist," multiple teaching positions (five in eight years), "asked to submit an amicus curiae brief" (e.g., took one side in a court battle), and "public witchhunt." In addition, reaction was sought here to the university teaching position as a magazine writing credential.

14 Westwood Avenue Apt. 15A
San Diego, CA 25476
July 6, 1988

Different locale, but not used to advantage.

Ms. Barbara Goodey
Ohio's Finest
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Good skills.

Extremely high cognitive complexity. Lack of tie to real people or even real events.

Dear Ms. Goodey:

In the summer of 1987, the Supreme Court upheld the judgment of two lower courts in striking down a Louisiana law requiring the teaching of creation science along with the theory of evolution. Widely heralded as a "win" for mainstream science, this ruling "appears to have put a stop for now to campaigns for similar laws in other states" (Scientific American, August 1987, p. 14).

Lack of concrete detail. News peg alleged, but not substantiated.

But the campaign appears to be heating up again -- in Ohio. As a teacher and Christian geophysicist, I would like to write an article giving your readers a balanced view of this controversy, before the discussions become too heated and too public. Most of my previous publications are technical: Science and Geological Review have published some of my articles on catastrophism and innovative methods for determining the age of geological materials, and I have recently published two textbooks, which I use in teaching graduate students in physics at a small institute in San Diego. I received my Ph.D. at Ohio State University (hence my interest in Ohio's concerns) in 1981 and, before taking my present position, taught at Ohio State, Stanford, New Mexico State, Washington State, and the University of California at San Diego. My interest in the social implications of science is recognized in the scientific community; in fact, I was asked to submit an amicus curiae brief in the Supreme Court case mentioned above.

Scientific publishing as a credential.

Within a few months, the Ohio legislature is likely to be embroiled in this controversy, which has many implications for scientific justice at all levels of education. I very much hope for the opportunity to give your readers the facts of this matter before the "powers that be" turn it into a public witchhunt.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Martin Fitzwilliam

Martin Fitzwilliam, Ph.D.

College teaching as a credential.

Institute of Creation Science

Extreme job mobility.

Cues to one-sidedness/bias, perhaps fanaticism.

Amicus briefs always take one side

Letter H: B.J. on the Cayman Islands

Factor Analysis. This letter comes from a somewhat experienced and very confident writer. She has researched at least one of her topics by traveling. She queries several ideas without developing them adequately enough for anyone to judge their attributes. One or two of the suggestions could be appropriate to the market if developed carefully, but the writer does not make this clear.

Persuasion. This breezy letter resembles many that magazine editors receive from professional writers (and novices as well). The writer attempts to appear an "insider" as a tactic for increasing credibility. Because many of the incoming queries reviewed in preparation for this study were of this ilk, the effectiveness of the "insider" strategy is tested here.

As with the real letters, this one offers a laundry list of ideas, none of them fleshed out. It is disorganized, and simple writing is used. Good photos are promised, which may meet editors' goals by simplifying the process of producing the article(s).

Ms. Barbara Goodey
Ohio's FINEST
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Disorganized.
Simple cognitive complexity.
Lively writing style, but no tie to real people (except self).

Familiarity.
Hi Barb--

Sorry I've been out of touch. I've been on assignment (no kidding) for Miami Invites... in the Cayman Islands--GREAT place (places?).

Naturally, I've come back with a knapsack-full of ideas for O's F:

Offers many choices to increase likelihood of compliance with one

- Vacationing in the Cayman Islands (How'd she get that idea???)
- Scuba diving (ditto)
- Tropical fish (they look very different when you put them in tanks)
- The new look in daycare centers (Ah, she's back home again...)
- Using tarot cards to help make New Year's Resolutions (for some reason, lots of people seemed to be doing this last year)

No concrete details.

Could be appropriate to market with work.

For the first three topics, I've got some fantastic photos, too.

Let me know which of these you like. I'll be out of town again next week, but I'll be back on the 25th.

Display of confidence.

Simplifies editor's tasks (if high quality).

Best of everything--

BJ

More familiarity shown.
No full name, no return address--
"Insider" as a strategic approach.

Letter I: What were the 60s really like?

Factor Analysis. This query comes from a very young writer who has as much experience as might be expected for a beginner in the field: some high school newspaper work and the beginnings of a journalism degree in college. His writing skills are adequate in terms of mechanics, but he doesn't develop ideas well. Because he doesn't develop ideas well, he hasn't given the editor a clear picture of the article he's offering. Also, he hasn't researched his topic (unless one includes talking with his father). The article could be appropriate to the market with a lot of editorial guidance, but is not, as offered.

Persuasion. Some trade press writers have suggested that a writer's persuasive credibility might be increased if they appeared more open to the editor's guidance. This letter offers editors a writer who is open to guidance and has enthusiasm and energy, as well as a modicum of skills. A question is whether editors have an interest in mentoring young writers and teaching them the trade, or whether a more mature, less pliable, more self-directed novice will be preferred (such as Maureen Thompson, ostensible writer of the city wildlife query). The letter includes a cue that many consider detrimental to persuading an editor: "I'm a sophomore at Ohio State" (e.g., a student).

July 7, 1988

Ms. Barbara Goodey
Ohio's Finest
1465 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Ms. Goodey:

What were the Sixties really like?

You remember them--but kids my age (19) don't! I think your readers might like to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear from their children's perspective. I envision an article based on my conversations with parents. My dad, who calls himself an aging hippie, has given me a lot of ideas. This article would also include the Eighties point of view: what we kids think of "your" nostalgia for the Sixties.

I'm a sophomore at Ohio State with a joint major in history and journalism, and I was a writer for my high school newspaper for two years. I am eager for experience in writing for a broader (and more mature!) audience, so I am really looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Marcus Phillips

Marcus Phillips

136 Woodruff #12
Columbus, Ohio 43201

Inexperienced, less skilled. Uses punctuation to achieve emphasis, rather than writing style/quality.

Poor skills: cliche.

Poor concept development. Low cognitive complexity. Weak vocabulary.

Negative cues: Young, inexperienced.

Positives: Eager, modicum of grammar skills.

Overconfident.

Letter J: Einstein's theory of "relatively"

Factor Analysis. This letter is at the low end on all factors. The writer is inexperienced, naive, and perhaps even a bit stupid. She writes awkward, disconnected sentences and misspells even her topic: relativity. While she is "in contact with some of the finest minds of our time," one has the impression she wouldn't know what questions to ask, nor would she understand the answers. She suggests a topic, rather than an article; thus, the attributes of the article are unknown. Last of all, the topic is not appropriate to the market. This letter is chiefly meant to provide a low-end reference point in the factor analysis.

Persuasion. This writer uses company stationary when writing her query. This was common among the sampled queries to Whittle Communication. She gives several cues to which editors may respond negatively: She suggests a pen name, not general practice in nonfiction writing. She does not use the language well in form **or** content. She uses a number of cliches and appears to regard them as original thought.

Columbus University
Center for Research and Development

1 INDUSTRIAL PARK DRIVE
LINWORTH, OHIO 43776

Uses company stationary.
Negative cue: Trying to impress by borrowing prestige.

Ohio's Finest
1465 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Low end on all counts.
Poor variety, word choices, idea development, etc., etc.

Inexperience cue: Lots of women in the magazine business.

Gentlemen:

Lack of concrete detail.

Weak.

I am planning to write a very interesting article on Einstein's theory of relatively ("E = mc^2"). As a staff member at Columbus University's Center for Research and Development, Inc., I am in constant contact with some of the finest minds of our time. I have spoken to many of them at length on the subject and hve also read many books and Scientific American, which I subscribe to. Also I will go to Ohio State University and talk to many of the emminent scientists there, and I also wrote a letter to Stephen Hawking, who seems like a very nice person and wrote a book about this.

Sp.

Cliche.

Typo.

Weak. Lack of concrete detail.

Sp.

Usage error.

Weak writing.

The old saying "It's all relative" really does have a basis in fact!

Weak–Who? Lack of concrete detail.

Hoping to hear from you, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Julie L. Farkas

Julie Lynne Farkas
(Nom De Plume: Giselle Krantz)

Inexperience cue.
(Magazine writers don't adopt such pen names–Romance writers do.)

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